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ABSTRACT

This paper considers strategies that have been put into place for peace education around the world. The paper discusses the street children of Brazil who are being rescued from violence by individuals following the philosophy of Paulo Freire. The paper examines the impact of the Iraqi invasion on children and families in Kuwait. It concludes by recommending the works of Professor Elise Boulding, especially her book, "Children's Rights and the Wheel of Life" (1979), an important contribution to family and child studies. (BT)

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by

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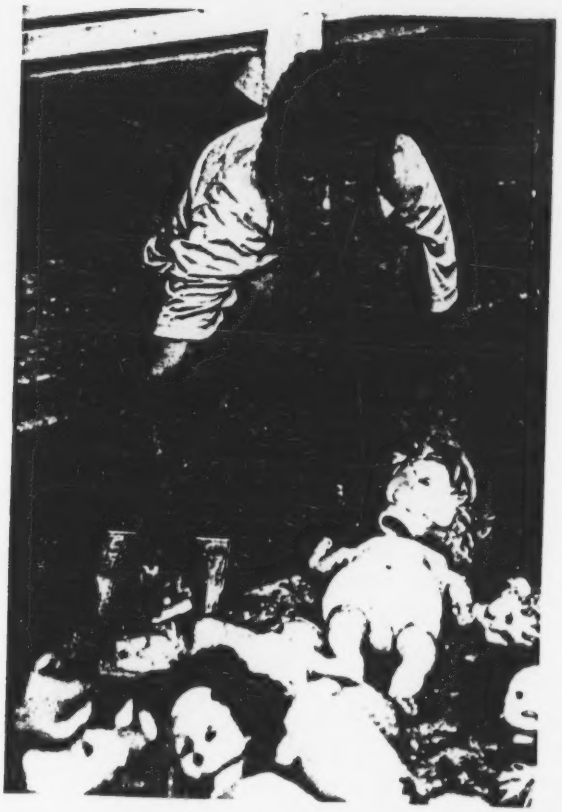
LOOKING INTO THE LIVES OF CHILDREN FOR INSPIRATIONAL PEACE-BUILDING

By Edith W. King, University of Denver

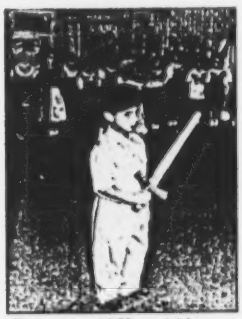
A paper prepared for the Symposium "Multiple Perspectives of International Peace Education "
American Educ. Research Association Meetings, April 24, 2000
New Orleans, LA

BRAZIL



A member of the girls' group cleans up broken dolls for recycling

KUWAIT



Five year old Kuwaiti boy dressed in military style.

Two five year old girls from Kuwait dressed in traditional costume

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Looking Into the Lives of Children for Inspirational Peace-Building

By Edith W. King, University of Denver

This stirring session on Multiple Perspectives for Peace Education calls on educators to clarify the roles that International Peace Education has taken late in the past century and now for the new millenium. We are here to discuss strategies that will advance the field of peace education research. The originators of this symposium envisioned our session as one that would promote international peace education as a goal to ensure basic human rights and an awareness of global dimensions of other cultures and communities. These efforts should focus on education for all children in a peaceful, nonviolent environment, as a basic human right. The materials I now present from my recent book, LOOKING INTO THE LIVES OF CHILDREN - A WORLDWIDE VIEW, represent such efforts in a global context.

First, a view of the street children in the major cities of Brazil: the social rejection of children is no more starkly displayed than in Brazil where street children have even been murdered by death squads. However, Brazil is also home to one of the most innovative efforts to rescue such children from violence. This effort rooted in the philosophy of Paulo Freire is placing the street children in the forefront of the struggle for children's rights. Next, I move to Kuwait to examine the impact of the Iraqi Invasion -- a brief but terrible war -- on children and families during and after this conflagration.

Brazil and Children for Social Change

The accounts of street children gathered by the journalist and writer on social issues, Anthony Swift, portray the conditions of physically and socially toxic environments that surround these young children. Here are two examples: First, the recollections of a teen-age girl when she began work on the streets at five years of age.

Denise's story: I started working when I was five. I wandered through my neighborhood trying to sell sweets. When I was eight, we had a financial crisis at home so I went to sell parsley and lemon in an area far from my own district. It was my decision but my mother thought it was great because we needed the money. She told me to go with my brother -- he was ten, then. He took me with him to this area call the iron market. I looked at the market -- the meat market constructed with ornate cast iron -- so it was called the iron market. I looked at the boats. I knew this was going to be my world from then on. When I started at the market I had nothing in my head. I realized I was nobody. It shocked me that my parents were so absent in my life. I thought my brother could protect me -- he wanted to, but he had his own preoccupations. He would leave me alone. I felt totally lonely and I really needed him. A woman who was selling the same things as I was selling, started hitting me because I sold more than her. I realized I would have to defend myself and I started to become very aggressive. I acquired the tools to defend myself. They were my strength, my alertness, my speed and my aggression. In the street you had to be very strong, or you would be caught. If I didn't defend myself, others would profit from me and I would not profit from anything. At first I sold bags and vegetables. Then I had to study during the day and would sell gum at night in the bars and the brothels, and to sweethearts in the squares.

(Swift, 1997, p.70)

Next the story of Maria's experiences; Maria assisted a woman who sold vegetables. At first one of her sisters worked with her but found the going too tough. Children were regarded as pests by some stall holders and subjected to exploitation and abuse by others. Girls suffered endless sexual harassment from men. Maria recalls:

> For a child of ten working at the market can be very scary. But taking food home to my family was a sacred activity. My father was a security guard. He earned very little. My work provided my family with the daily meal. To work on the streets you had to be very closed in on yourself because they put a lot of pressure on you. At times the stall holders would even chase us out of the market or seize our merchandise. They would beat up the paper bag sellers. They were really mean. It was hard to earn enough by selling vegetables. Some girls did sell their bodies to get a little money for their families. At times I did not want to go to the market, but I had no choice. (Swift, 1997, p.121)

In his seminal book on the street children of Brazil, *Children For Social Change*, (Educational Heretics Press, 1997) Anthony Swift details the attitudes and situations of the teachers assigned to the schools that the street children sporadically attended. Swift writes that mainstream education in Brazil derives from inappropriate European models translated to schooling under former colonial rule and never attuned to the circumstances and priorities of children living in poverty. "Inflexible, authoritarian, technically oriented the educational system failed to recognize that many children were forced to work to

support themselves and their families." He observed that teachers were desperately under-paid, under-resourced and in many cases poorly trained. They had neither the skills nor the patience to respond to these exploited children working daily in the streets of the towns. Quoting a social worker for the street children, Swift writes that schools really did everything they could to exclude these children. "The biggest problem of all was the teachers' attitudes. Teachers and principals regarded such children as inferior and incapable of being educated." (Swift, p.75)

Globally, some efforts are being launched to recognize the plight and the needs of these street children. Stemming from the from the initiatives of the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 a number of strategies have been proposed for responding to the issues of child labor exploitation. These strategies include:

... advocating governmental legislation for compulsory schooling from the early years (4 to 5 years of age to school leaving policies at 14 - 15 years);

... strict enforcement of federal-level legislation prohibiting exploitive child labor based on the United Nation's Declaration of the Rights of the Child;

...provision of protection through services and material benefits to children and families and the belief in implementing the child's right to participation in decision making.

Although the discussion here merely raises the situations of exploitive child labor, it is an important issue worldwide and awareness of these traditionally hidden conditions in the lives of children are now being exposed and investigated in a global context through non-

governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as through international governmental organizations (IGOs).

The terrible toll that war and violence wrecks upon children and families, as well as the urgency for international peace research and education was never more clearly articulated and brought to worldwide attention than in the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait in 1990. The aftermath of this rather brief and geographically localized, but horrendous conflagration, was fully and carefully documented. Just how devastating even a short war in these times can be for young children and their families is revealed in data from a unique, doctoral dissertation research project using both quantitative and qualitative methods on segments of early childhood education in Kuwait after the Iraqi War.

The Impact of the Iraqi Invasion on Kuwait's Young Children

(The following material was excerpted from the doctoral dissertation of Eisa Al Balhan, University of Denver, College of Education, 1998)

When Kuwait was invaded by Iraq in 1990, it came as quite a shock because Iraq had been considered a friendly and secure neighbor by the Kuwaiti population. The Iraqi occupation of Kuwait lasted only six months; but during that time the people of Kuwait suffered inhumane acts of violence, including torture, rape, and murder. The number of declared martyrs, including civilians and military personnel was assessed at approximately 600 individuals. Officials of UNICEF reported that at least one quarter of Kuwaiti children either experienced or witnessed aggression on the part of the Iraqi soldiers.

Research conducted soon after the occupation indicated that children experienced an average of six war-related events during the occupation. The most common events were violence in the media, being present at shelling and combat, witnessing actual acts of violence and destruction, displacement, having parents or relatives arrested, and resulting bereavement. Children whose fathers held high-status position were more likely to be intimidated, abused, and tortured by Iraqi soldiers. One report asserted that more than 8,000 young Kuwaiti children feared for their lives, especially those who witnessed the brutality committed by Iraqi soldiers.

Families were torn apart during the Invasion because many Kuwaitis felt the necessity to hastily leave Kuwait City and go to nearby countries, which were not involved in the conflagration. In contrast to their relatively stable, peaceful lives prior to the occupation, many children found themselves living with just one parent, changing their home frequently, and being cared for by differing individuals. This led to feelings of isolation and confusion for children. The normal social order and daily life style were disrupted. Children could not go outside because of the continual danger. They had to play inside, often not consistently supervised and disciplined.

After the Iraqi Occupation of Kuwait ended, UNICEF officials, researchers and others began to document the impact of the occupation on Kuwait's inhabitants. Among these researchers, Dr. Amira Al-Dieb (1991) reported that the Invasion left Kuwaiti children with a strong feeling of negativism towards the Iraqis; many children expressed the belief that all the Iraqi people should be punished, even those who had no part in the war. A

further investigation of Kuwaiti children's attitudes and feelings found that when children were asked " How do you feel when you see the Kuwaiti flag?, 40 % of the children mentioned the Iraqis as their enemy, and 19 % specifically mentioned Saddam Hussain as their enemy. Extensive research projects carried out from 1991 to 1994 documented the following debilitating conditions in young Kuwaiti children due to the widespread disruption of families and daily life during the six months of the War: sustained shock, anxiety and fearfulness; emotional vacancy, recurrent nightmares; fear of uniformed persons; loss of appetite; frequent unexplained crying; increased reports of physical maladies such as headaches and gastrointestinal distress; and persistent bed-wetting. Further in a study by Hajjia (1994) children expressed beliefs that the would not live past 20 or 30 years of age. Some investigators indicated that girls seemed more exposed to psychological and social dangers than boys; and that girls reported more symptoms of stress than did boys. Yet, investigators found an increased interest and participation in daily life and events by a number of children after the Iraqi Occupation ended.

Before 1990, various articles containing observations of young Kuwaiti children documented their tendencies to play with toys showing preferences for non-violence, to create drawings of peaceful scenes, and for singing songs expressing the love of their country. After the Invasion researchers found that the most popular games among young children were those of warring and killing the enemy. Children's pictures now portrayed the invaders and their destructive nature, and the most popular songs were those sung during the Iraqi War. Teachers noted that now young children commonly played out

scenes of violence on the playground, expressed a preference for military-style dress and outfits, or expressed aggressions with war-type toys.

Additionally, school personnel, such as psychologists and social workers were alerted that after the Iraqi occupation ended they could expect an increase in children with special needs, children identified as suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. This condition included symptoms such as loss of abilities to concentrate and to retain information. Social workers also saw increases in problems such as aversion to attending school, continued truancy, poor academic performance and social isolation in classroom, playground and school setting. Teachers reported a significant increase in verbal aggression of youngsters and these conditions were characteristic of boys, more than girls. One researcher was able to document a new phenomenon for Kuwaiti schools, that of the students engaging in verbal and physical conflicts with teachers and other adults on the school staff.

The above information focused on quantitative descriptions of the conditions of children during and after the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait in 1990. To obtain more in depth, empathetic insights on the impact of violence and war upon the children and their families, anecdotes and accounts of individuals' lived experiences are important. This is the qualitative approach to research that brings new insights and firsthand views to the human suffering that occurred. (King, 1999)

Some Closing Remarks

I conclude this brief presentation for our session by referring the audience to the works of my mentor, revered colleague, and longtime friend, Professor Elise Boulding. Her important contribution to family and child studies, *Children Rights and the Wheel of Life*, published in 1979 provided interpretations and implications for the international data now being amassed on many aspects of the life space, conditions, hazards, and menaces faced by children, families, and the aged. In this book, as in other of her writings, Elise Boulding puts forth insightful analyzes of this data intended to motivate social scientists and policymakers to perceive children and youth as co-participants in the shaping of society and not merely as its victims. (Cuzzort and King, 1995) This is being demonstrated today by the street children of Brazil as I have just described.

Elise Boulding's work and contributions to peace education and peacebuilding are certainly unending. Her new book, *Cultures of Peace,* will be available next month from Syracuse University Press. In it she examines structural violence in terms of the major obstacles to a more peaceful future. Here, Boulding continues to describe the social movements around the world that are developing to empower peacebuilding activities. I thank you for this opportunity to discuss my efforts and those of others to bring a peaceful future to children, families and communities the world over.

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